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ABSTRACT

The challenge posed by a decline in minority enrollment and a new push to raise college admission standards is discussed. State governing board members must consider whether to institute more stringent and systemwide admissions policies and must weigh the effect of such policies on prospective minority enrollment. Policymakers need to protect the basic principles of fairness and opportunity in higher education. To assist policymakers with decisions on systemwide admissions policies, the Educational Testing Service initiated a study by Hunter M. Breland on the impact of the following five admissions models on minority enrollments: single index model, multiple index model, either-or model, sliding scale model, and predicted performance model. Another study, conducted by Richard Duran, which used data on Hispanic performance on admissions tests, raises important issues for state boards of higher education. An example of the difficulty of shaping a fair standard across colleges is the recent controversy over the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Proposition 48, which stipulates academic standards for freshmen athletes. The College Board has developed guidelines for systems or groups of colleges that use College Board tests for admission purposes. (SW)

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A CHALLENGE FOR THE STATES: Protecting Minority Access within Systemwide Admissions Standards

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by Gregory R. Anrig

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Public concern for more rigorous educational standards so far has focused mainly on the elementary and secondary schools, but important changes also are taking place in public higher education.

A growing number of state governing agencies are raising the requirements for admission to public universities and colleges. Twenty-four states now have statewide minimum admissions standards. In 13 of these states, public institutions of higher education are not allowed to exceed state requirements, while the other 11 states give individual institutions authority to impose more stringent admissions standards. Three states (Illinois, North Carolina, and Tennessee) have the power to establish systemwide standards but, in 1984-85, gave public institutions the authority to set their own requirements. In the remaining 23 states, authority to set admissions standards rests with the individual governing boards of public colleges and universities.[1] While most of the new standards involve increased high school course requirements, others require higher class-rank, grade-point-average, or test-score minimums.

This trend towards statewide admissions standards for public universities and colleges has happened at a time when minority enrollments in all of higher education have been declining. According to the American Council on Education, college enrollment of Black students as a percentage of the number of Black high school graduates has declined from 32 percent in 1975 to 27.8 percent in 1980. For Hispanics, the decline has been from 35.4 percent in 1975 to 29.9 percent in 1980.[2]

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There are many reasons for this decline in minority enrollment; it would be a mistake to assume it has been caused by higher admissions standards. The country has struggled through a severe recession with high unemployment; federal student aid programs have been shrinking in terms of real dollars; college costs have spiraled upward with inflation. Regardless of causes, however, the fact remains that college attendance by minority students increased dramatically and steadily in the post-World War II period—to a percentage equaling that of White students in the mid-1970s—but has declined significantly since 1975.

A Challenge for Decision Makers

These trends—the decline in minority enrollment and the new push to raise standards—create a special need for caution in public policy making. Members of state governing boards for public higher education, who must decide whether or not to institute systemwide admissions policies or to make them more stringent, need to weigh the effect of such policies on prospective minority enrollment.

For 40 years, the aim of educational policies at the institutional, state, and federal levels has been to broaden access to higher education. This policy aim has been achieved, first through the G.I. Bill and then through today's student aid programs. Throughout these years, public higher education has led the effort to make post-secondary access universal for those who are qualified and willing to work for it. As the diversity and numbers of applicants have grown, admissions practices have been developed to provide more information about students and their potential for success in college. Scores on standardized national admissions tests, such as the SAT and ACT, have been used increasingly as part of the informa-

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Financial realities and public demands for tougher educational standards must be addressed, but the educational opportunities of students—majority as well as minority—are affected by such decisions.

tion considered in reaching admissions decisions.

Such tests can open doors or close them. As has been evident since California first developed its master plan for public higher education in the 1950s, the choice of direction is determined not by tests but by educational policy, including policies for how test results will be used. Use of admissions tests increased most during a period when doors to higher education were opened wider to students of all races and socioeconomic levels and participation in postsecondary education expanded nationwide.

Our post-World War II accomplishments can be eroded, however, unless public decision makers—many of whom have been leaders in the broadening of access to higher education—act with great care in the face of current pressures. Financial realities and public demands for tougher educational standards must be addressed, but the educational opportunities of students—majority as well as minority—are affected by such decisions. In responding, policy makers will need to protect the basic principles of fairness and opportunity that have so benefited higher education and the country in recent decades.

The Breland Study

To assist policy makers with decisions on systemwide admissions policies, Educational Testing Service initiated a study of the impact of different admissions models on minority enrollments. ETS Senior Research Scientist Hunter M. Breland in a new report identified five models (other than minimum high school course requirements) used for systemwide and institutional admissions policies for state colleges and universities.[3] Using a random national sample of 96,229 college-bound seniors who participated in the College Board's 1983 Admissions Testing Program, Breland has analyzed the effects of these five models on eligibility for admission by race and ethnic group.[4] (The table on page 5 summarizes the impact of these models.)

The Breland study includes tables that project for policy consideration the percent of high school seniors eligible for college admission by race and ethnicity within each of the five models. While the tables are based on national data from the study sample, state-specific data are available from the College Board (for states where most college-bound students take the SAT) and could be similarly applied to analyze the impact of policy alternatives before their adoption by a state governing board.

As a result of this analysis, Breland reaches two conclusions. First, all of the models

> . . . proved to have differential impact for the three groups examined (Black, Hispanic, White). This impact is diminished by setting very low qualifying minimums, but a solution of this sort fails to recognize institutional constraints on the number of students who can be served. Additionally, low qualifying minimums exacerbate the problem of student retention in college because many students who qualify do not perform well following admission. The degree of the impact was found to vary for different models and, within models, for different indexes and different combinations of indexes. For instance, single-index models using test scores had the greatest differential impact while single index models using high school rank or grades, either-or models, sliding scales, and predicted performance models had less differential impact.[5]

A second general observation made by Breland from the analysis of models—and one familiar to members of state boards of higher education—was that

> . . . state institutions differ somewhat in the abilities of entering students, in the grading standards used, and in minimum requirements for remaining in good standing. Because of these institutional differences, state-level policies which require blanket minimums are problematic in this context. The predicted performance model is the only one of the five examined that necessarily recognizes these institutional differences. And, it is the only model that customizes the weighting of various component indexes for specific institutions.[6]

The Need for Caution

Admissions decision making in American higher education traditionally has involved a careful balancing of information about individual applicants. Most admissions officers attempt to get an overall sense of an applicant's strengths and weaknesses before reaching a judgment. This judgment is based not only on the applicant but on characteristics of the particular institution as well.

Statewide admissions standards in public higher education need to provide for flexibility as well as uniformity. How else can one provide for "balancing of judgment" and for institutional differences within the constraints of a common statewide standard?

Before coming to ETS in 1981, I served for eight and a half years as Commissioner of Education for the Massachusetts State Board of Education. I understand the political, educational, and financial pressures that are pushing up admissions standards and causing some state governing boards to do this on a systemwide basis. I also understand, however, that such pressures can result in policy decisions that, while objective on their surface, can erode the strong commitment to educational opportunity found in many state constitutions and laws.

Test results, when used in combination with other information about students' accomplishments, properly can have a role in standards for admission to colleges and universities. This was reinforced in 1982 when the Committee on

Ability Testing of the prestigious and independent National Academy of Sciences reached the following conclusion after a three-year study by experts in testing, education, and law:

The evidence indicates that predictions made from test scores are as accurate for Black applicants as for majority applicants; there is only scanty evidence available for other minority groups. Subgroup differences in average ability test scores appear to mirror like differences in academic performance as measured by course grades. In this sense, the tests are not biased.[7]

However, a subsequent re-

Summary Table for Five Models of Statewide Admissions Policies
(Data from National Sample)

Models/Minimums	Percentage Eligible by Group[1]			Differential Impact (%)	
	Blacks	Hispanics	Whites	Blacks	Hispanics
Single Index Model					
Rank in top two-fifths	59	64	71	12	7
GPA ≥ 2.75	52	65	72	20	7
SAT ≥ 800	27	43	73	46	30
Multiple Index Model					
Top two-fifths and SAT ≥ 500	58	65	72	19	7
Top two-fifths and SAT ≥ 600	46	59	71	25	12
GPA ≥ 2.50 and SAT ≥ 700	37	55	77	40	22
Top three-fifths and SAT ≥ 800	27	43	72	45	29
GPA	28	42	72	46	30
Either-Or Model					
Top two-fifths *or* SAT ≥ 1100	59	67	74	15	7
Top two-fifths *or* SAT ≥ 1000	60	68	78	16	8
GPA ≥ 3.0 *or* SAT ≥ 900	47	61	73	30	12
Top one-fifth *or* SAT ≥ 800	46	57	79	33	22
Sliding Scale Model[2]	46	59	75	29	16
Predicted Performance Model[3]					
Sample Institution A	40	60	72	32	12
Sample Institution B	37	58	72	35	14

Notes

[1]The comparisons in this table reflect situations where about three-fourths of White students are eligible, which is a common level of selectivity among public universities and colleges.

[2]Sliding scales typically emphasize high school rank or GPA at the higher ability levels, with either no test score requirement or with a relatively low test score minimum at the higher ability levels. Five different sliding scales were examined in the Breland study. The sliding scale presented here represents the same level of selectivity as other examples in this table. In this sliding scale, all students in the upper tenth of their high school class rank are eligible. There is no test score requirement for students at this level of rank. Students in the second tenth are required to have an SAT combined score (Verbal plus Math) of at least 800; students in the second fifth, 700; students in the third fifth, 900; students in the fourth fifth, 1100; and students in the last fifth, 1300.

[3]Predicted performance models use a weighted combination of the high school record and test scores to predict college freshman GPA. For the analyses reported here, weighted combinations of high school GPA and SAT combined scores (Verbal plus Math) were used. Students predicted to attain freshman GPA's of at least 2.50 were considered eligible. Ten sample institutions, all state universities or colleges and representing a range of selectivities, were examined in the Breland study. Sample institutions A and B presented here represent the same level of selectivity as other examples in this table.

Source: Excerpted from Hunter M. Breland, *An Examination of State University and College Admissions Policies*. Research Report 85-3. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1985.

search study conducted for the College Board by ETS Researcher Richard Duran raises important issues for state boards of higher education to consider. The study, which used data on Hispanic performance on admissions tests that the National Academy of Sciences Committee did not consider, found that ". . . high school grades and admission test scores were not as good predictors of U.S. Hispanics' college grades as they were of White non-Hispanics' college grades. Overall, the evidence indicated that there was less association between Hispanics' high school grades and college grades than there was for Whites' grades. U.S. Hispanics' verbal and quantitative test scores did not associate as strongly with college grades as was the case for Whites . . ."[8]

Duran cautions about how such test scores should be used for Hispanic students and concludes:

> . . . While the evidence is still relatively sparse, the direction and pattern of findings thus far [indicate] that neither high school grades nor admissions test scores alone or in combination ought to bear the sole burden of evidence for making decisions to admit Hispanic-background students to college. The evidence reviewed in this study supports the positive value of high school grades and college admissions test scores in aiding decisions about Hispanics' college admission. However, the results suggest that admissions officers ought to rely critically on the overall profile of Hispanic students in making admissions decisions. The results of studies reviewed here suggest that admissions personnel need to be provided with a broader range of information on Hispanics' background, language, and culture in weighing admissions decisions.[9]

The National Academy of Sciences Committee came to a similar conclusion with regard to admissions policies for minority students in general. It cautioned that ". . . a policy decision to base an admissions program strictly on ranking applicants in order of their expected success will tend to screen out minority candidates . . ."[10] The goal of admissions decision making, said the Committee, ". . . should be to effect a delicate balance among the principles of selecting applicants who are likely to succeed in the program, of recognizing excellence and of increasing the presence of identifiable underrepresented subpopulations . . ."[11]

The recent controversy over Proposition 48 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides a good case study of how difficult it is to shape a fair standard across institutions of higher education.

It is just as imperative that statewide admissions policies be shaped to achieve this "delicate balance" as it is that admissions officers achieve it in reaching the decision whether or not to admit an individual applicant to a particular institution.

The recent controversy over Proposition 48 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides a good case study of how difficult it is to shape a fair standard across institutions of higher education. In a well-intended effort to prevent the exploitation of student athletes, the NCAA adopted a rule for freshman eligibility to participate in athletics. The standard was based on what Breland calls "Multiple-Index Minimums" (2.0 high school grade average in 11 academic courses *and* an SAT combined score of 700 or an ACT composite score of 15).

Two studies of Proposition 48—one initiated by the NCAA and one by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers—have recently been completed.[12] Both studies reached compatible conclusions: the standard established by Proposition 48 has an impact that is especially adverse to Black students and that results in a significant portion of students (White and Black) being ineligible for freshman athletics who otherwise would have succeeded academically. This much publicized case highlights the complexity of a common standard for groups of colleges and universities—whether in an athletic association or in a state system of public higher education.

Revised College Board Guidelines

Recognizing the pressures this issue has put on governing boards for public higher education, the College Board—a membership organization representing 2500 schools and institutions of higher education—has recently revised its *Guidelines on the Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data*.[13] The new guidelines include a section addressed specifically to systems or groups of colleges that use College Board tests for selection (admissions) purposes. In such instances, the College Board advises that the officials responsible for the group or system should:

- Know enough about tests and test data to understand their proper use and their limitations.
- Collect and consider recent admissions validity data for each individual institution in the group or system and conduct appropriate validity studies for the system or group as a whole, or for major subgroups.
- Consider test scores in conjunction with information about the secondary school record and other information about applicants in assessing their abilities to undertake college-level studies, recognizing that a combination of predictors is almost always better than a single predictor.

Striving for educational excellence and greater access are long-standing traditions in American higher education. State boards of higher education and the public institutions they govern have been leaders in creating this historic record.

- Conduct appropriate studies to ensure that uniform standards can apply and are appropriate to the populations of students served and to the missions of the colleges.
- Take into appropriate consideration predictions of performance for applicant subgroups in developing equitable admissions policies.
- Request that individual institutions validate data used in the admissions process and conduct appropriate system or group studies regularly (e.g., every three years) in order to ensure the continuing relevance and appropriateness of the information used in the combinations established for the admissions policies.
- Before determining the admissions policies to be adopted for the group or system of colleges, allow sufficient time and opportunity for representatives of the individual institutions to consider and discuss possible policies and to suggest alternative policies, especially as these relate to their institutions.
- When introducing or revising admissions policies, allow sufficient lead time and provide considerable notice to schools and students, so they can take the new policies into account when planning school programs and curriculum offerings.

Conclusion

The revised College Board *Guidelines* and findings in the Breland study, the National Academy of Sciences report, the Duran study, and the studies of Proposition 48 all advise care and flexibility in setting statewide admissions standards for public higher education.

Recognizing the complexity and effects of such decision making, members of state governing boards of higher education will want to keep five questions in mind when considering policy proposals for common admissions standards:

1. How can the impact of alternative policies be determined before reaching a decision, especially with regard to the race and ethnicity of those to be admitted? (The Breland study provides an example of how such analyses can be organized.)
2. How can a systemwide admissions policy recognize and provide for differences among educational institutions within the system?
3. What is the best way to use admissions test results, the academic record, and other information about applicants to achieve the intent of the policy?
4. Once implemented, how can the policy's results be reviewed periodically in order to assure that they are consistent with its publicly stated intent?
5. How can the policy be supplemented with special admissions provisions in order to promote diversity of enrollments by race and ethnicity in public colleges and universities?

Striving for educational excellence and greater access are long-standing traditions in American higher education. State boards of higher education and the public institutions they govern have been leaders in creating this historic record. It is in the nation's interest that their policies continue to sustain this commitment amidst the pressures for educational reform in the 1980s.

Notes

[1] Margaret E. Goertz and Linda Johnson, *Trends in State Policies for Admission to Higher Education*. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service (ETS Research Report to be published in 1985).

[2] American Council on Education, *Minorities in Higher Education*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Minority Concerns, American Council on Education, 1984, p. 10.

[3] Hunter M. Breland, *An Examination of State University and College Admissions Policies*. Research Report 85-3. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1985.

[4] Out of a total of 875,475 college-bound seniors participating in the 1983 College Board Admissions Testing Program who reported their ethnicity, the 96,229 randomly selected for the study sample included 490 American Indians, 3,859 Asians, 7,781 Blacks, 1,656 Mexican-Americans, 1,080 Puerto Ricans, 76,010 Whites, 2,041 "other," and 3,312 without ethnic identification. Students who had identified themselves as American Indians, Asians, "other," and those without ethnic identification were excluded from the Breland analysis.

[5] Breland, p. 4.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[7] Committee on Ability Testing, Alexandra K. Wigdor and Wendell R. Garner (ed.), *Ability Testing: Uses, Consequences, and Controversies. Part I: Report of the Committee*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1982, p. 200.

[8] Richard P. Duran, *Hispanics' Education and Background—Predictors of College Achievement*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1983, p. 102.

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 105.

[10] Committee on Ability Testing, p. 196.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 196.

[12] Ted J. Bartell, J. Ward Keesling, Linda A. LeBlanc, Richard Tombaugh, *Study of Freshman Eligibility Standards*. A report for the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Reston, Va.: Advanced Technology, Inc., August 1984.

Educational Testing Service and American College Testing Program, *Athletics and Academics in the Freshman Year: A Study of the Academic Effects of Freshman Participaton in Varsity Athletics*. A report for the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and the American Council on Education, with the cooperation and support of the College Board. December 1984.

[13] The College Board, *Guidelines on the Uses of College Board Test Scores and Related Data*. New York: The College Board, 1984.

Interested AAHE members may obtain single copies of Hunter Breland's study without cost by writing: Gregory R. Anrig, Educational Testing Service, Rosedale Rd., Princeton, NJ 08541; 609/921-9000.